

劉以鬯：對倒

Intersection

By Liu Yichang

Translated by Nancy Li

1

WHEN the number 102 bus entered the Cross Harbour Tunnel, Chunyu Bai thought about what it was like more than twenty years ago. He had been living in this big city for over twenty years now. Twenty years ago, Hong Kong's population was only about 800,000; now, it was nearly four million. Many of the remote districts had become bustling resettlement areas. Old buildings had turned into skyscrapers. He could not forget how he'd arrived in Hong Kong from Shanghai by plane more than twenty years ago. He had wrapped himself in a cumbersome fur-lined overcoat when he boarded the plane, but on disembarking, he saw many Hong Kong people wearing just a white shirt. Winter here was not all that cold. Even on Christmas Eve, people still ate ice-cream at dinner. Chunyu Bai arrived in Hong Kong from the North on Christmas Eve. North of the Yangtze River, the flames of war burned higher and higher. The currency crisis was suffocating the public and Shanghai was caught up in the turmoil of war. Many people went south; some settled in Guangzhou; others chose Hong Kong. Chunyu Bai had never been to Hong Kong but he wanted to move there. There was only one reason for this: the

stability of the Hong Kong dollar. When Chunyu Bai arrived in Hong Kong from Shanghai, one U.S. dollar was equivalent to 6 Hong Kong dollars; now it was worth 5.625 Hong Kong dollars.

2

A large part of the old building's wooden staircase had been eaten away by termites, and when someone stepped on it, it creaked. These steps should have been repaired or replaced a long time ago. There was only one reason why it hadn't been repaired or replaced—the owner had already sold this pre-war building to a rapidly expanding developer for a good price. This was what Ah Xing's aunt had told her. Ah Xing's aunt had been living on the third floor of this old building for more than twenty years, and since Ah Xing was on very good terms with her aunt she often dropped in on her without any particular purpose. Now, as she walked down the wooden staircase, she was holding a pear that her aunt had given her. She walked out of the building at exactly the same time as Chunyu Bai's bus entered the Cross Harbour Tunnel.

Turning into a side street, a terribly offensive

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odour assaulted her nose. It was the public toilet, which made every passer-by cover their nostrils with a handkerchief or their hand. Ah Xing did not like this side street because of the public toilet. Every time she passed it thoughts like this entered her mind: "When I get married and look for a flat, I must find one with a good location. There mustn't be a public toilet nearby."

3

When the bus turned on to Nathan Road, Chunyu Bai saw a woman. She was about forty years of age and looked entirely different from the woman he had known twenty years ago. She was no longer beautiful. Though he had just caught a brief glimpse, Chunyu Bai could see clearly how old she was. She was no longer a young woman. She was walking along the pavement with her two children. If you hadn't seen her twenty years ago you'd never believe that she had once been a beautiful woman. She had several names. When Chunyu Bai first got acquainted with her at a small dance hall twenty years ago, she was known by the rather vulgar name of "Pretty". A pretty woman didn't necessarily have to be called Pretty. She wasn't stupid but she had given herself a stupid name. Chunyu Bai was not at all well-off then. In fact, most of the refugees from China were in financial difficulties then. Pretty often invited Chunyu Bai for a midnight snack at the Kowloon Restaurant. Chunyu Bai wanted to find a job, but there weren't enough jobs to go round. Without a job, he lost interest in everything. He stopped going to the dance hall, and he stopped seeing Pretty. His spirits only revived after he got a job. When his high spirits returned, he went to see Pretty, but she had already left the dance hall. Two years later, he met her on a cross-harbour ferry. She was no longer called Pretty and she was married. When the ferry arrived at Hong Kong Island, they parted. And then, for a long time, neither knew how the other was doing. When he met her again, she had changed not only her given name, but her surname as well. It was at a friend's party. She said she'd been divorced. That night, they partied until the small hours. That night, Chunyu Bai saw her

home. That night, Chunyu Bai slept at her place and that night, Chunyu Bai said to her, "Next week, I'm going to South-East Asia." A week later, Chunyu Bai left Hong Kong. The woman who once called herself Pretty saw him off at the airport and even gave him a shirt as a present, one she'd made herself. Chunyu Bai still had that shirt. It was old and worn now, but Chunyu Bai was reluctant to throw it away. He often thought about this woman. Just now, as the bus was driving along Nathan Road, he saw this woman who had once called herself Pretty, but who was no longer pretty.

4

Ah Xing saw the black dog fat as a pig come waddling over. It stopped in front of a fruit shop and lifted its hind leg to urinate on a lamp-post. She saw this black dog often and often saw it urinate. She often saw this black dog trotting here and there. In fact, everything which unfolded before her eyes was familiar to her. She even remembered the footprints in the cement pavement.

5

The bus was speeding along Nathan Road. Glancing out of the window Chunyu Bai found that the old four-storey building had not yet been demolished. Nathan Road was lined with new buildings on either side and there were not too many old ones left. Chunyu Bai paid particular attention to that old building because twenty years ago, he would go there frequently to speculate in gold. "2.5 ... 2.75 ... 2.5 ... 2.75 ... 3.0 ... 3.25 ... 3.5 ... 3.25 ..." The voice reporting the market situation came through the microphone and fell upon the hearts of the speculators like a barrage of pebbles. Chunyu Bai was all too familiar with the speculators' mentality. Before leaving Shanghai, he entrusted a friend with a sum of money to take to Hong Kong. At that time, the financial situation in Shanghai was in a mess. The value of the currency was fluctuating minute to minute, and yet, the public was ordered

to surrender whatever gold they owned. Chunyu Bai did not surrender his gold; in secret, he gave it to a Hong Kong businessman with the understanding that he would get the equivalent back in Hong Kong dollars when he got to Hong Kong. At that time, a gold bar was worth 3,000 Hong Kong dollars but Chunyu Bai only got 2,500. Obviously this meant taking a loss and Chunyu Bai was fully aware of this. The problem was there no other way to send gold to Hong Kong. North of the Yangtze River, the military situation was getting more precarious. Whenever friends met, the conversation, in mosquito-soft whispers, would run like this: "How about you?"

"Me?"

"Don't you want to leave Shanghai?"

"I'd like to, but it isn't that simple."

"Have you ever been to Hong Kong?"

"No."

"Many people have gone to Hong Kong, haven't they?"

"Yes, many people have gone to Hong Kong."

Things were tense in Shanghai; the pulse of the whole city had accelerated. Everyone knew the importance of the battles in Xuzhou and Bengbu. The news in the papers might not be reliable and news passed by word of mouth was inevitably spiced up. Property prices suffered the worst fall; a house with a garden was worth only seven or eight gold bars. The rich all took flight. Asthma sufferers seized the chance to move south for treatment. At first, Chunyu Bai didn't want to leave Shanghai. But one day, a close relative from Nanjing whispered into his ear, "The situation at the front isn't too good. You'd better leave." Only then did Chunyu Bai screw up his courage. He asked a friend to buy him an air ticket and left that nerve-racking, rumour-ridden city. When he arrived in Hong Kong, he was a total stranger. A fellow, also from Shanghai, who regarded himself as an "old Hong Kong hand" helped him and some others rent flats in Kowloon in a new building with flats of about three or four hundred square feet. They had to pay a commission; besides the first month's rent, they had to pay an extra month's rent as down payment. Premiums were very expensive in those days and people had to pay commissions to rent flats. In those days, there were just too many "refugees" swarming

into Hong Kong from the mainland. Most of the new buildings were "crash-course graduates" or jerry-built; speed was all that mattered. The faster the buildings went up, the more money the owners could earn. In those days, there were many new buildings in Kowloon; all four-storeyed row houses, very different in style from today's skyscrapers. Nowadays, tall buildings tower everywhere in Hong Kong and Kowloon; all the downtown areas have become "skyscraper jungles". Obviously, the old building Chunyu Bai had just seen was an exception, and it made Chunyu Bai think of the past. At that time, unable to find a suitable job, he went to the gold exchange almost every day to speculate. Now, sitting on the bus, he suddenly felt as if he were back there once again. He seemed to hear the voice reporting the market price, "3.5 ... 3.75 ... 4.0 ... 4.25 ..."

6

All women love looking at clothes. Ah Xing was no exception. Her heart beat wildly when she saw a manikin wearing a wedding gown in the window of a photographer's studio. The gown was made of white gauze as thin as a cicada's wing; it was beautiful. Ah Xing gazed at the wedding gown wide-eyed. She couldn't help feeling jealous of the manikin. "Even the ugliest woman will turn into a goddess in this beautiful gown," she thought. Staring at the wedding gown, her eyes filled with envy. After she'd been staring for some time, a smile appeared on the manikin's face. A manikin couldn't smile. The smiling woman in the wedding gown was actually herself. The window before her suddenly became opaque and turned into a mirror. Ah Xing saw herself in the "mirror", dressed in a white gauze wedding gown, as beautiful as a goddess.

7

The bus came to a halt. A sudden impulse prompted Chunyu Bai to get off the bus with the other passengers. He didn't know why, but that was what he did.

This was Mongkok. In the past, he had walked

along this road innumerable times. There were too many people here. There were too many cars. Mongkok was always so crowded. Everybody seemed to have some urgent business on hand; the rushing, sweaty people were not necessarily all bent on striking it rich. The Japanese dolls in the department stores had lovely smiles. The songstresses at the opera house had eyelids with double folds produced by the plastic surgeon's knife. A revolving restaurant. The registration for buying next year's mooncakes by instalments had begun. A thirty-percent discount on all books put out by this publisher. Fresh-water crabs from Yangcheng Lake on sale at 3 p.m. tomorrow. Shrimp dumplings, spring rolls, taro croquettes, steamed rice dumplings, barbecue-pork buns

8

Next to the photographer's studio was a toy shop; next to the toy shop was an optician's shop; next to the optician's shop was the gold and jewellery shop; next to the gold and jewellery shop was a restaurant; next to the restaurant was the grocer's; next to the grocer's was a shop selling the latest fashions. Ah Xing entered the clothing shop and saw some weird clothes in the latest styles. One blouse had two hearts printed on the bosom. Too many "I LOVE YOU"s in English were printed on one outfit. Ah Xing was particularly interested by that outfit printed with the English words "I LOVE YOU". "Mom doesn't know English," she thought, "I'm sure Mom won't scold me if I buy it. In this outfit, I'd probably attract some strange man to come and talk to me." Ah Xing hadn't yet had a boyfriend. Walking out of the clothing shop, she had a strange feeling, it might have been happiness, but there was a touch of melancholy to it. Next to the clothing shop was a liquified petroleum company; next to the liquified petroleum company was a gold and jewellery shop; next to it was another gold and jewellery shop; and right next to that was yet another gold shop.

Standing in front of the window of the gold and jewellery shop, Ah Xing stared at the word "double happiness" and imagined what her own wedding would be like. It was the biggest res-

taurant in all Hong Kong and Kowloon, able to accomodate more than two hundred banquet tables. Hanging on the wall was a silk wedding banner with the words "double happiness" printed in gold. In front of it stood a long rosewood table with a pair of wedding candles on it. The tongues of the flames leapt upwards. She and her groom were sitting at a big round table in front of the rosewood table. The bridegroom was very handsome and looked like a movie star—a bit like Ke Junxiong, a bit like Deng Guangrong, a bit like Bruce Lee, a bit like Di Long, and a bit like Alain Delon.

The thud of footsteps brought her back to reality. A long-haired young man came tearing along the pavement and bumped into her; she lost her balance and almost fell down. She felt a sudden surge of anger and uttered some foul expletives. It was a vulgar curse, but by the time she uttered it, the young man had already disappeared into thin air. There was a disturbance in the vicinity, as if a large stone had suddenly been thrown onto the surface of a tranquil pond. Although she didn't know what was happening, she felt a sense of alarm on seeing the police. The policemen's legs pumped like pistons; they had guns in their hands. When they brushed past her, her anger suddenly turned into fear and she started to tremble. Her eyes were wide with astonishment. "Someone robbed the gold shop!" It wasn't clear where these words had come from, but shock and fear made her heart miss a beat; then her heart-beats accelerated, thud, thud, thud, as if someone were pummelling her insides. The people around—Ah Xing included—panicked like a startled flock of birds. She was at a loss what to do. For a while, her reason failed her; she felt numb and wanted to leave the scene of the crime, but her legs refused to follow her will, so she just stood there in a daze. Two men were standing three feet away from her, talking loudly. "That guy has guts!" "Was he alone?" "He had a cleaver and a rock. He flashed the cleaver in front of the counter and smashed the showcase with the rock. He got away with jewellery worth tens of thousands of dollars!" "Tens of thousands of dollars!" "There were eye-witnesses. The robber only grabbed diamonds and jade." "He sure has guts!" "If you've got the guts, you don't have to

pin your hopes on lottery tickets." Ah Xing turned to look at the two men; one of them was holding a bamboo pole with lottery tickets fastened to it by clothes-pegs. He was a vendor of lottery tickets.

9

Chunyu Bai walked on. There were too many people on the pavement; there were always too many people in Mongkok. Some idiot was wriggling through the crowd like he was doing a dragon dance; he stepped on a woman's foot and the woman cried out; he covered his mouth to conceal his smile.

Standing in front of an optician's shop, Chunyu Bai admired the popular old-fashioned spectacle frames as if they were works of art. "I didn't need spectacles a few years ago," he thought. "Now, not only do I have to wear them while watching movies, I even have to have a different pair for reading." His train of thought was interrupted by a conversation between two men. They were both middle-aged; one was fat, the other thin. The fat man had a tense look about him and when he spoke, his eyes grew round as longans.

"Haven't you heard?"

"What?"

"A gold and jewellery shop over there was robbed."

"Have the robbers been caught?"

"They snatched some jewellery and disappeared into the crowd."

"How much did the shop lose?"

"Some say tens of thousands of dollars."

"Was anyone hurt?"

"I don't think so."

"Hong Kong just isn't safe anymore."

The fat man sighed; the thin man followed suit. The fat man said, "Goodbye." The thin man also said, "Goodbye." The fat man headed south; the thin man headed north.

Chunyu Bai walked on and saw a black dog. It was fat as a pig and came swaggering over; it trotted up to the bus stop, lifted its hind leg and urinated on the silver-coloured railings. The urine splashed onto a woman's shoes; she pulled a long face and drove the dog away in a stern voice.

Chunyu Bai couldn't help smiling on witnessing this scene. He remembered a pug-dog called "Mary" and another pug-dog called "Lucky". He had had a pair of pug-dogs at home when he was in secondary school. Later, Mary died. Lucky also died, but by that time, Chunyu Bai had another five pug-dogs. When he left Shanghai, the five pug-dogs ran round him, barking incessantly

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He stopped in front of a clothing shop.

10

When her fear had dissipated, Ah Xing strode on; she glanced at the crowd of people gathered there, and glanced at the lottery ticket pole hoisted in the middle of the crowd like an umbrella. The lottery tickets were fluttering in the wind. The middle-aged lottery ticket vendor was still telling how he had witnessed the gold shop robbery. His voice was very loud. No one bought any tickets from him. Ah Xing thought, "When I win the lottery, I'll buy three new flats; two in Mongkok, and the other in Mid-levels on Hong Kong island. I will live in Hong Kong with Mom, and give the two flats in Mongkok to Dad so that he can live on the rent."—Ah Xing's father was a strange man; he went out in the afternoon and didn't come home until late at night. No one knew what he did, not even Ah Xing and her mother.

Ah Xing came to a halt in front of the gold shop which had just been robbed. A lot of people were standing there watching. The iron shutters of the shop were half-closed. Ah Xing could not see what was going on inside, so she stooped down to get a better look. Although she saw some legs moving about, she couldn't tell what the people were doing. Some policemen had arrived to maintain order and to stop on-lookers from getting too near the shop. There was a lively discussion among the on-lookers, everybody trying to get a word in; each of them raised his voice in an attempt to drown out the voices of the others.

There was a young couple in front of her. The young man had his left arm round the girl's shoulder, while the girl's right arm was around the young man's waist.

"Some day, when I have a boyfriend, I will

walk with him this way on the street or in the park or in the countryside," she thought, "But where can I find a boyfriend? Why haven't I got one? The shop assistant in the grocery downstairs, Ah Cai, often smiles at me, but I don't like him. His jagged teeth are so ugly. He has a brandy nose, so ugly. He has a scar on his temple, so ugly. My boyfriend must be as handsome as a movie star."

After walking for a while, she saw a young man, tall and thin, with long hair, wearing a pair of Levis, his right hand in his pocket. The jeans were blue but the pocket was a square patch of red. Ah Xing stared at him; she couldn't take her eyes off him. The young man had a long thin cigarette

clenched between his teeth.

Ah Xing walked up beside him and took a look at him.

He turned and took a look at Ah Xing.

To her disappointment, the young man with the cigarette between his teeth refused to take a second look at her and strode off across the street. Ah Xing stared at his back, and felt as if someone had slapped her in the face. She wished a speeding car would knock him down.

She continued along Nathan Road when, suddenly, she felt it was no fun loitering on the street, so she crossed the street and turned into a side street, heading home with a heavy heart. Unlike Nathan Road, the side street was not crowded with pedestrians, but there were many illegal hawkers on either side, which made the place look very disorderly. Ah Xing lowered her head, as if she had some intractable problem on her mind. In fact, a fit of melancholy had overtaken her. She was still thinking about that young man clenching a cigarette between his teeth. She clung to the opinion that a young man should wear his hair long, grow a small moustache, wear Levis, have his right hand in his trouser pocket, and a cigarette clenched between his teeth. She wished she could marry such a man. At this moment, she had come to within a hundred yards of home, and she saw a photograph lying on the ground.



By John Wu

11

Looking at his own reflection in the mirror, Chunyu Bai found that the wrinkles on his forehead had grown deeper and the white hairs on his head had increased. This was a clothing shop; one side of the shop window was fitted with a long narrow mirror. Chunyu Bai looked at himself greedily in the mirror. Gazing at his own image, he couldn't help recalling the way he had looked in his youth.

12

Seeing the photograph, Ah Xing couldn't restrain her curiosity; she stopped to pick it up. At first, she had no idea what it was; but once

she had it in her hand and took a good look at it, her heart started beating wildly. It was an obscene photograph of something Ah Xing never even dared think about. She knew it was something wicked. Suppose she took it home, she would certainly get in trouble with her parents if they discovered it. "I'll tear it up," she thought. But she was very curious. For her, the photograph was a source of excitement; each look at it stirred in her an indescribable sensation. "Why should I tear it up?" she thought, "I'll be doing the same thing anyway when I get married." She thrust the photograph into her handbag. "Back home, I can hide in the bathroom, and then take a closer look at it." With this in mind, she entered the building and took the lift upstairs. When she got home, her mother was in the kitchen, so she took her pajamas, went into the bathroom and closed the door. She studied the photograph closely; she felt so embarrassed that her face grew red hot. She took off her clothes, stood in front of the mirror and stared wide-eyed at herself.

13

Looking at himself in the mirror, Chunyu Bai thought about the battles raging about the International Concessions in Shanghai; he recalled the scene as three bombers flew over the Huangpu River and destroyed the ship *Chuyun*; he thought about the detachment besieged in the warehouse of the four big companies; he thought about how Shanghai became an isolated enclave, and the many assassinations which took place there. Then, the war in the Pacific broke out and Japanese tanks raced along Nanjing Road.

14

Whenever she looked into the mirror, Ah Xing thought she had a beautifully shaped face, one she could be proud of. Perhaps it was a kind of narcissism; whenever she had the chance she would admire her own beauty in a mirror as if it were a work of art. She didn't much care what others thought of her.

When she observed herself closely in the mirror,

she thought she was more beautiful than the movie star Chen Baozhu; there was no reason why she couldn't be a movie star too.

When she observed herself closely in the mirror, she thought she was more beautiful than the singer Yao Surong; there was no reason why she couldn't be a popular singer too.

Every time she thought about her own future, all sorts of strange notions came into her head; that was the kind of girl she was. Before this, although her thoughts were unrealistic, they were innocent; now having seen the photograph she picked up in the street, her mind was suddenly filled with dirty thoughts. She had never had such an experience before but she knew what it was all about. She imagined that a man "a bit like Ke Junxiong, a bit like Deng Guangrong, a bit like Bruce Lee, and a bit like Alain Delon" was in the bathroom with her. Only "that man" and herself, no one else. As she dwelt upon that idea, she felt constricted, a constriction all over her body, as if the four walls were closing in on her, like mechanical traps in *kungfu* movies. Her face grew as red as the rising sun and she felt a prickling sensation all over her skin; her heart began to pound; it was on fire. A look into the mirror gave her a sudden boost of confidence. Losing all rational control, she did something totally inexplicable—she pressed her lips to the mirror and kissed her own image there.

This was a new thrill for her. For the first time, she had a lover; that lover was herself.

She didn't dare take another look at herself in the mirror; nor did she dare to look at the photograph again. She was like an old-fashioned bride. In spite of her curiosity, she lacked the courage to steal a look at the groom whom she had never set eyes upon. She suddenly grew serious and tried to divert her thoughts to other matters. She thought she should start thinking about Chen Baozhu. She thought she should start thinking about Yao Surong. To her, Chen Baozhu and Yao Surong were happy women.

Stepping into the bathtub, she stared at her own body. This was something she had rarely done before; she had always felt that a woman's face was the most important thing, without being aware of the importance of the body and its movements. The photograph had impressed her

so deeply that her interest in her own body was aroused. She was young and still had a baby-face, but her breasts were well developed. This was certainly not a new discovery for her, yet she was a bit surprised when she inspected her body carefully.

Soaping up her body had formerly been a mechanical act. Today, because she had picked up an obscene photograph, she felt a curious kind of craving as she rubbed the soap on her skin; she imagined that her hands belonged to someone else.

She wished that her hands belonged to "that man". That man who was "a bit like Ke Junxiong, a bit like Deng Guangrong, a bit like Bruce Lee, a bit like Di Long, a bit like Alain Delon". She even wished "that man" would step into the bathtub and bathe with her. She even wished . . .

Half an hour later, she lay on her bed in her bedroom, staring at the ceiling. She should have thrown that photograph out of the window, but she didn't. She had hidden it at the bottom of her leather suitcase instead.

The record shop downstairs was playing a song by Yao Surong, "I'll love you for 360 years."

15

The man in the mirror seemed to have become someone else. Chunyu Bai kept gazing into the mirror for another two or three minutes but then dared not look any more; he walked on. He felt an insurmountable loneliness although the pavement was packed with pedestrians. When he saw a restaurant decorated in South-East Asian style, he pushed open the door and entered.

The restaurant was not large, but long and narrow, and decorated in a fairly modern style. The walls were covered with dark blue wallpaper and the lighting was dim. Though it was crowded, Chunyu Bai found an empty seat. He sat down and ordered a cup of coffee. He saw a young man come in. He was tall and thin, with long hair and a small moustache, and was wearing a pair of Levis, his right hand in his pocket. The jeans were blue, but the pocket was a square patch of red. A long, thin cigarette was clenched between his teeth. The man stood near the door and gazed

around, looking for someone. Next to Chunyu Bai there was a small round table; a young woman was sitting there. She was wearing a stylish blouse, one sleeve longer than the other; the cuffs of her jeans seemed to have been cut with scissors.

The thin man with the long, thin cigarette clenched between his teeth went up to this woman, pulled over a chair, and sat down.

"Is Fatman gone?" the young man exhaled his words in a stream of smoke.

"He left half an hour ago," the woman pointed at a cup of coffee in front of her, "This is my third cup of coffee."

The long, thin cigarette was still clenched between the young man's teeth; his face was expressionless.

"Have you got it?" he asked.

"Only five hundred."

"Didn't Fatman promise you a thousand?"

"He said he lost a lot of money at the dog races."

A look of anger appeared on the man's face. He took two puffs on his cigarette and stubbed it out in an ashtray. When he spoke again, his words came out through clenched teeth, "He promised you a thousand!"

"What could I do? He was only willing to give me five hundred," the woman's voice was also a bit angry, but she had a pleading expression on her face.

"Don't tell me you don't know how to deal with someone like Fatman."

"The money was in his pocket; I couldn't snatch it from him, could I?"

All of a sudden, the young man stood up and walked out in a huff. The woman hadn't expected that, and followed after him as fast as she could, but a waiter stopped her. "What is it?" she asked. "You haven't paid yet," said the waiter. She opened her handbag, fished out a ten-dollar note, and without waiting for the change, strode out of the restaurant. Chunyu Bai watched her go. A faint smile appeared on his face. Then, his attention was caught by an oil painting. The oil painting was quite large, about two feet by three feet, and was hanging on the papered wall. At first, Chunyu Bai hadn't taken much notice of it, but this chance glimpse made him feel that there was something very familiar about the scene. It was a corner of

a bazaar. It showed a person eating mutton soup at an Indian cooked-food stall—a hawker selling tropical fish was changing the water for his fish—durians on the fruit stall—an old woman carrying a basket and looking at the vegetables—a cock-fight—the wet ground—all this confusion reflected a strong local colour. It was a bazaar in Singapore. Chunyu Bai had once lived in Singapore for a while. When he was living there, he often went to the bazaar for spare-rib tea. He had a special fondness for spare-rib tea. On Sundays especially, when he did not go to the Mitoro for rice with chicken, he would have spare-rib tea at the bazaar.

Just then, he heard Yao Surong singing. Yao Surong cried while she sang. When she performed in public, some people paid to hear her sing, but others paid to see her cry. This was an irrational place and many people did irrational things. So, shedding tears became a kind of performance and everybody said she sang well.

Sitting in a dance hall in Shanghai listening to Wu Yingyin singing "Sending my love a thousand miles away on a moonbeam" was entirely different from sitting in a restaurant in Hong Kong listening to Yao Surong singing "I'm not coming home tonight". The mood was different because the times had changed. The times Chunyu Bai longed for were gone. Nothing from that period survived. He could only look for his lost happiness in his memories. Yet, the memory of happiness was like a faded photograph, blurred and unreal. When he heard Yao Surong sing, he remembered those vanished years. Those bygone days were something he could only look at through a dusty window pane; something he could see, but couldn't touch. And everything he saw was blurred and indistinct.

A thin pale-faced man walked in with a boy of around seven or eight years old. At first, they couldn't find a seat. Later, when the people at the small round table next to him had gone, they sat there.

"I want ice-cream," the boy said.

"You can't have ice-cream," said the thin man.

"I want ice-cream!" said the boy.

"You can't have ice-cream!" said the thin man,

"You're going to have hot milk!"

"I want cold milk," said the boy.

"You can't have cold milk!" the thin man said.

"I want cold milk!" the boy said.

"You can't have cold milk!" the thin man said.

The thin man ordered hot milk and ice-cream. The ice-cream was for himself. The boy snivelled and wiped his tears with the back of his hand.

"Stop crying!" the thin man's voice was very loud.

"I want my mommy!" the boy said, crying.

"Go to hell and look for her!" the thin man's voice was very loud.

Several customers in the restaurant had turned to look at the thin man, their attention caught by his voice. The thin man didn't notice; neither did the boy, who was wiping his eyes with the back of his hand.

"I want ice-cream!" the boy yelled, crying.

"You can't have ice-cream!" the thin man rebuked him angrily.

"I want cold milk!" the boy yelled, crying.

"You can't have cold milk!" the thin man rebuked him angrily.

"I want my mommy!" the boy yelled and cried.

"Go to hell!" The thin man had a loud, piercing voice.

The boy cried at the top of his lungs. The thin man lost his patience and struck the boy heavily on the head. The boy cried out loudly. His cry was like the wail of a police siren. The thin man was beside himself with anger; he stood up, threw a five-dollar note on the table, grabbed the boy by the collar and roughly dragged him out. The boy squatted on the floor and refused to move. The thin man's face grew pale with rage. For a few seconds, he stared at the boy dumbly with furious eyes; then he suddenly released his hold on the boy, and strode out of the restaurant alone. The boy was panic-stricken; he stood up and rushed out. At this moment, a waiter brought in a dish of ice-cream and a glass of hot milk on a tray. When he found that the thin man and the boy were gone he didn't know what to do.

"They're gone," said Chunyu Bai.

"Gone?" asked the waiter.

"There's five dollars on the table," said Chunyu Bai.

The waiter shrugged, took the five dollars, gave it to the cashier, and took the ice-cream and hot milk back to the kitchen.

Four Shanghai women were having a heated discussion about property prices. They were speaking very loudly; others might not be able to understand, but Chunyu Bai understood clearly. Woman A was giving an account of how she'd queued up to buy a flat. She said, "I started to queue before dawn. I waited several hours but still I had no luck." Woman B said, "My aunt bought five new flats in Wanchai last year, at about \$30,000 each. Now they're worth \$100,000 each." Woman C said, "Why have property prices gone so high?" Woman A shrugged her shoulders and said, "Who knows?" Woman D said, "There's a place in Kowloon where flats are being sold even before they've been built; someone snapped up ten flats in one go without even looking into their size or the direction they faced." Woman B said, "Hong Kong is really a strange place; there are people here who do nothing but speculate in property and are now living in the lap of luxury." Woman D said, "As I see it, it's easier to get rich by speculating in property than in the stock market." "Yes, you're right," said Woman A, "It is. The risk is higher for stocks than for property; you get ups and downs with share prices, but the way things are, property values only rise." "That's all very well," said Woman C, "but property prices have already gone through the roof. The price of a flat in Mid-levels has gone up to hundreds of thousands of dollars; even an ordinary flat costs over \$200,000." Woman A said, "Property prices will go even higher. Hong Kong is so small and yet there are so many people. They still haven't got round to solving the basic problem of housing." Woman A said, "The higher the prices, the more people want to buy!"

Chunyu Bai lit a cigarette.

16

Ah Xing lay on the bed, staring at the ceiling. The record shop downstairs had already played many records. Most were Yao Surong records. "After I've become a famous singer, not only will I be able to earn over ten thousand dollars a month, but I will also be chased by a lot of men . . . a lot of men . . . I will be chased by a lot of men as handsome as Ke Junxiong, Bruce Lee, Di

Long, and Alain Delon These men will give me big diamond rings. These men will give me large limousines. These men will give me big apartments. These men will give me many many things"

Her eyes were glued to the ceiling, where the circular beam of a spotlight suddenly appeared. In this spotlight stood a heavily made-up woman in an evening gown, microphone in hand, singing. The woman was very beautiful. Behind her several Filipino musicians played a popular song, "Country Roads". Ah Xing loved the tune of "Country Roads"; she also knew how to sing it. Sometimes, when there was no one in the flat except herself, she would sing it in a loud voice, and not at all badly either. The woman who had suddenly appeared on the ceiling also sang quite well. Ah Xing was curious and looked closer; the woman singing into the microphone was herself.



By John Wu

Although she had never had the experience of getting drunk, she felt drunk now. She really cherished this feeling; she stared at the ceiling again. The scenery on the ceiling changed suddenly, like the sets in a play. Now it was a bedroom decorated in a very modern style, the kind of bedroom that could only be seen in the movies. The bed was huge and the floor was carpeted; the walls were covered with dazzling red wallpaper and the curtains were very beautiful. All the furniture was Scandinavian. The style of the dressing table was very striking and there were a lot of expensive cosmetics on it. She sat at the dressing table and looked at herself in the mirror. Besides herself, there was a man in the mirror, standing behind her. The man looked a bit like Ke Junxiong, a bit like Bruce Lee, a bit like Di Long, and a bit like Alain Delon. The man was smiling. The man whispered words as sweet as honey into her ear. He gave her a big diamond ring. Suddenly, a large number of stage lights appeared on the ceiling; it was a film studio. The newly-built set and the actual surroundings were two entirely different worlds; the artificial world was very beautiful while the real world was littered and disorderly. The director was the busiest person on the set. Handymen were scurrying about everywhere. There was a young couple in front of the camera; the man looked a bit like Ke Junxiong, a bit like Bruce Lee, a bit like Di Long, and a bit like Alain Delon. The woman was herself.

"A famous singer might earn more than a movie star, but a movie star gets more attention than a famous singer," she thought, "A movie can be shown simultaneously in ten districts and in a hundred cinemas."

She saw ten of herself.

She saw a hundred of herself.

The ceiling became a screen. She was smiling sweetly on the screen. Her smile appeared in ten districts at the same time; it appeared on the screens of a hundred cinemas at the same time.

Eyes. Eyes. Eyes. Eyes. Innumerable eyes were gazing at her smile. Just then, the record shop downstairs was playing Yao Surong's "I'm not coming home tonight" again. She also knew how to sing "I'm not coming home tonight". She felt that she could get more public attention

as a movie star than as a singer. There were many pictorials on the ceiling. There were many newspapers on the ceiling. *Hong Kong Movies. Screen World. South China Cinema. Gala Cinema. The Sing Tao Illustrated. Four Seas Weekly. Sing Tao Evening News. Daily Express. The Limelight. Entertainment News. Sing Pao. Ming Pao.* Her picture was on the cover of every one.

Mother came into the bedroom to get the scissors; her footsteps woke her up. Tonight at dinner, they would have a dish of sautéed shrimps with bean curd. Before the shrimps were sautéed, they had to be cut with scissors.

"What time is dinner?" asked Ah Xing.

"Seven o'clock," replied Mother.

"Would half-past seven be all right?"

"But why?"

"I'm going to the movies."

"The five-thirty show?"

"Yes."

17

Chunyu Bai raised his head and blew smoke rings towards the ceiling. He had already finished half a cigarette. When he smoked, he always thought about the past. Some trivial events, all deeply buried, would emerge from his store of memories and flash across his mind like sparks of fire. Trivial things like the Golden City Cinema in Shanghai showing "Confucius" directed by Fei Mu; eating giant salamanders at the Guiyang Restaurant; the old-fashioned cameras at the Hechi Photo Studio; sailing at Leqing; taking a bath at the Longquan public baths; travelling from Ningbo to Ninghai by rickshaw; etc. . . . These were all small things which one might not think about for years; now, they suddenly re-emerged from his store of memories. When people were lonely, they liked to think about the past; they appreciated the events of the past as if they were old photographs. Chunyu Bai was a man fuelled by his past. His life force was activated by his memories.

He remembered his first cigarette. He was just over twenty then, and had gone from Shanghai to Chongqing on his own to work for a newspaper. One day, on a flight of steps where rats scurried

about, a colleague nicknamed "Old Chimney" offered him a "Capital Ship". The tobacco was rolled up in powdery paper from Chengdu; the powder came off while you smoked, turning your lips white. The first time Chunyu Bai smoked, he choked so hard that he gasped for breath. His colleague said, "It's foggy in Chongqing; cigarettes are good for you."

Adding some colour to his memories was something he did often in recent years.

A customer sitting nearby walked out and left a newspaper behind. Feeling bored, Chunyu Bai picked it up and started to skim through it. The foreign news was mostly about the war in Vietnam; the local news was mainly about robberies. Such news had lost its appeal; Chunyu Bai turned his attention to the movie advertisements. When he read that a film he wanted to see was being shown in a nearby cinema, he asked the waiter for the bill at once.

18

Standing in front of the record shop, Ah Xing saw a large number of records. The album covers all bore coloured pictures of the singers. Ah Xing liked these records very much; she also liked the singers. Yao Surong, Deng Lijun, Li Yaping, You Ya, Ran Xiaoling, Yang Yan, Jin Jing, Betty Zhong, Jenny Zhong, Xu Xiaofeng, Zhen Xiuyi, Pan Xinqiong . . .

Gazing at the photographs, Ah Xing suddenly saw herself on the cover of a record displayed along with others. The album was called "The Moon is like a Lemon". The album cover had a beautiful picture of the singer on it. She had bright eyes and red lips, extremely beautiful. On closer observation, she saw that it was herself. This was incredible; but she did indeed see her own record there. She always liked singing "The Moon is like a Lemon". She especially liked the lyrics. The moon is like a lemon; a moon which resembles a lemon. This image had never appeared in Ah Xing's mind before. Whenever she looked up at the moon, she felt that it was like a big lamp. Having heard this song over and over she forced herself to associate the moon with a lemon. She felt that she was right for this song and that she

would sing it very well. Now, having found her own album amidst the pile of records, she was so happy and excited that she walked into the shop. Standing at the counter, she never doubted her eyes for a moment. She reached out her hand and took the record. She held it before her eyes, but one look at it was like cold water dashed in her face. It was "The Moon is like a Lemon", sung by Zhao Xiaojun. It was Zhao Xiaojun's picture on the album cover, not hers.

"Shall I play it for you?" the shop assistant interrupted her train of thought.

She put down the record, turned round, and made a hasty exit from the shop, as if pursued by a horde of demons.

Having crossed the street, she walked towards Nathan Road. "One day, the record shop will ask me to make a record for them," she thought.

The sudden screech of a car braking gave her a start. A car had knocked a woman down.

The police arrived.

With the help of the driver of the car, the injured woman was carried to the side of the street. She opened her eyes. Ah Xing followed the crowd to the pavement. She sighed with relief when she saw the woman open her eyes.

The woman was still bleeding. The policeman walked to the centre of the road and marked the position and the number of the car on the road with a piece of chalk. The driver then parked the car to one side. The other cars which had been held up started to move and the traffic returned to normal.

19

When the traffic returned to normal, Chunyu Bai was standing on the other side of the road. In spite of his curiosity, he didn't cross the road to take a closer look. He just stood near the silver-coloured railings and watched how the policeman handled the accident. Over thirty years ago, when he was still a middle school pupil, he saw a tram pulling up at the tram stop on his way home one day, and he raced across the road. But he slipped on the rails embedded in the road and fell flat on his back. Then there was the screeching of brakes and he lost consciousness. When he came round,

someone was cursing him, "If you wanna kill yourself, don't do it on the road!" Chunyu Bai propped himself up on his hands and tried to get up, but his legs were as stiff as wood.

Now, when he saw the woman knocked down by a car, though he was looking at the other side of the road, he was thinking about events of over thirty years ago, "Death isn't something to be afraid of," he thought. More than thirty years ago, he had been on the brink of death and he knew what it was like.

The ambulance arrived, bringing this real-life drama to an end.

20

This real-life drama was nearly at an end. Ah Xing lifted her head and turned towards the sound of the ambulance siren. The siren's wail was loud and piercing but the ambulance was not going very fast.

The ambulance stopped near the injured woman. Two male nurses with a stretcher went up to her, examined her injuries, and put her in the ambulance on the stretcher.

Ah Xing looked down at her wrist-watch; the movie would start in ten minutes. If she wanted to catch the movie, she couldn't waste any more time. She headed for the cinema.

21

While Chunyu Bai was queuing up to buy a ticket, Ah Xing walked into the cinema. Although some of the posters outside were very attractive, Ah Xing dared not waste any more time because she saw a queue at the box office. She joined the queue. "This must be a good movie. If not, why are there so many people?" She thought, "The male lead is very handsome."

22

"The female lead is very beautiful and looks a bit like Helen Hayes when she was young." Chunyu Bai's eyes fell on the poster. Movie posters were

always so vulgar. "Yet, there is a kind of sweetness in her dignity," he thought. "Helen Hayes in 'Everlasting Love' was dignified, beautiful, and charming. The leading lady of this movie looks very much like the young Helen Hayes." Thinking about Helen Hayes in the thirties, he had moved up the queue to the box office window unawares. Most of the numbers on the seating plan had been crossed out in red pencil. Chunyu Bai saw two empty seats in a row at the front, G46 and G48, the latter on the aisle. The seat was quite near the screen, still, it seemed good enough. He pointed at G48 and paid. The box office clerk took the money, crossed out G48 on the seating plan, wrote G48 on the ticket, tore it out of the book, and handed it to Chunyu Bai. Glancing up at the heroine on the poster, Chunyu Bai walked cheerfully into the cinema. An usher showed him to his seat; he sat down. He looked up; there was a cigarette advertisement on the screen.

23

Standing in the queue, Ah Xing saw more and more people lining up; she became anxious and impatient, afraid she wouldn't get a ticket. She looked at the poster on the wall and thought, "The leading man is handsome and looks a bit like Alain Delon. There wouldn't be so many people coming to see the film if he wasn't such a box-office draw."—Her eyes were upon the hero's face, as if it were a rare jewel worthy of appreciation.

The man in front of Ah Xing was very thin; his peaky face had a sickly pallor. There was a boy standing beside him. The boy's eyes were red and swollen; he had obviously been crying.

"I want ice-cream," said the boy.

"Just now in the restaurant, I wouldn't have made such a stink if you hadn't made such a row about having ice-cream." There was an obvious note of recrimination in his voice, "The ice-cream was left untouched and so was the milk; five dollars for nothing!"

"I want ice-cream!" said the boy.

"No ice-cream!" the thin man scolded, "If you don't stop making a fuss, I won't take you to the movie!"

"I don't want to go to the movie, I want ice-cream!" said the boy.

"There you go again; mind you don't make me lose my temper!" The thin man's pale face turned livid.

The boy turned aside and stared at the sweets counter. Seven or eight people were crowding in front of it; five or six of them were buying ice-cream.

"I want ice-cream!" the boy said to the thin man.

"No ice-cream!" the thin man scolded him.

"I want my mommy!" the boy cried again.

"Go to hell!" the thin man sounded like he was quarrelling with someone.

At this, the boy burst out crying at the top of his lungs. His crying drew much attention. The thin man was so embarrassed that he grew furious. Whenever he got furious, he could no longer remain rational or sober. Losing control, he gave the boy a hard smack on the head. The boy's cries were as loud as the wail of a police siren. The thin man grabbed the boy by his collar and dragged him away from the cinema. This scene was acted out right in front of Ah Xing's eyes; she couldn't help pitying the boy. "A motherless child can never get a mother's love from its father," she thought. After three or four minutes, it was Ah Xing's turn to buy her ticket. The seating plan was full of red marks; Ah Xing nearly went cross-eyed. She couldn't find a single space which hadn't been crossed out in red pencil. The box office clerk pointed his red pencil at G46 impatiently, which meant that this seat was empty. As she saw that there weren't many empty seats left, Ah Xing could only nod and give the box office clerk the money.

Ticket in hand, she walked into the theatre and the usher showed her to her seat.

24

She was sitting side by side with Chunyu Bai.

25

Chunyu Bai turned his head to look at her. Ah Xing also turned to look at him.

Chunyu Bai thought, "She isn't bad-looking, a bit like one of my schoolmates in secondary school. That girl's surname was Yu but I've forgotten her given name."

Ah Xing thought, "So it's an old man. How boring! It'd be nice if the man sitting beside me looked like Ke Junxiong."

They were showing the trailer of a forthcoming movie; a woman with a beautiful figure was walking about in her bedroom with nothing on. There was a long mirror on the wardrobe. The mirror reflected a bed. A man and a woman were on the bed; the man was naked and so was the woman. A sheet of opaque glass. Behind the glass was a bath; a woman was taking a shower. A close-up: a man's hand squeezing a woman's breast. Then came the titles: "An epoch-making production", "Don't miss it", "Not suitable for children", "Coming next". Then advertisements again. When the advertisement for a certain brand of whisky was on the screen, the cinema suddenly grew very noisy. This hubbub made both Chunyu Bai and Ah Xing aware that just now, the trailer had made the audience hold their breath. Now that advertisements were on again, everybody relaxed.

Chunyu Bai thought, "Since this is not suitable for children, how can they show it before the main movie begins? Children are not barred from the main movie; the trouble is, a lot of children have now seen that trailer."

Ah Xing thought, "Just now, while that old goat was watching the trailer, his head didn't move an inch; now he's turning to look at me again. How disgusting!"

26

On screen was the scene where the heroine and hero get married. Ah Xing was so carried away by the drama that she was oblivious to everything. Although there was nothing to blur her vision, she saw that the heroine on the screen had become herself. She was very beautiful. She was standing side by side with the hero in front of a priest. The priest was holding a Bible in his hands and was gabbling a long passage from it. Ah Xing didn't understand a word of it. Even if she had not been

concentrating on the wedding gown she was wearing, she wouldn't have understood. The wedding gown was exactly the same as the one that she had seen earlier in the shop window. The manikin's wedding gown had been made of white gauze as thin as a cicada's wing. She believed that in this gown, even the ugliest woman would look as beautiful as a goddess, let alone she, who wasn't ugly at all. In this dress, she was certainly fit to marry the hero of the movie. She felt she was very beautiful on screen, especially when she was exchanging wedding rings with the bridegroom—so shy, so lovely.

27

The wedding of the hero and the heroine was on the screen; Chunyu Bai recalled his own wedding. The wedding hall was oblong. There were silk wedding scrolls hanging on the walls, and dozens of banquet tables. Seated at each table were his friends and relatives, all dressed to the nines. The atmosphere was very lively. Everybody thought that this was a happy event. Chunyu Bai believed that this was the beginning of a happy life. The bride also believed that this was the beginning of a happy life. All his friends and relatives believed that the seeds of bliss and happiness had been sown. All weddings were like this. Now, seeing the wedding of the hero and heroine being performed on the screen, he couldn't help smiling. In truth, it was a big joke. On screen, the newlyweds ran out of the church jubilantly; he laughed out loud.

28

The sound of his laughter woke Ah Xing from her dream-world and brought her back to reality. The heroine on the screen was no longer herself. She turned and glared at Chunyu Bai in disgust. "He's nothing but a sex maniac," she thought, "Laughing like this at people getting married. This wedding scene must have triggered a lot of dirty thoughts in his mind; why else did he laugh? Only a sex maniac would do that; only a sex maniac would have such dirty thoughts."

29

When "THE END" appeared on the screen, Ah Xing followed the crowd out of the cinema.

30

Following the crowd out of the cinema, Chunyu Bai was behind Ah Xing.

31

Once out of the cinema, Ah Xing headed south.

32

Chunyu Bai headed north. While he was walking northwards, he saw a man with a bamboo pole in his hand; there were many lottery tickets fastened to the pole with clothes-pegs. Amidst the lottery tickets, there was a piece of red paper. "Wealth is at hand" was written on the paper. He didn't fish out the two dollars and ten cents to buy a cheap but sweet dream, but was reminded of a past event. It was more than twenty years ago. He liked betting on the horses then. Sky-master had been the horse of the year in Happy Valley and Mr Black was the most popular jockey of the day. The entrance fee for the public stands was only three dollars then. The new public stand hadn't been built yet. However, lottery tickets only cost two dollars each; the price of everything else had soared, but lottery tickets hadn't gone up. Twenty years ago, a first-prize winner could build a house with what he won, but now, first prize wasn't even enough to buy a duplex apartment on the Peak Thinking about this, he arrived at the bus stop. He intended to return to the Hong Kong side for dinner.

33

Ah Xing crossed the road and started walking home. Passing the entrance of a restaurant, she glanced at the pictures of the singers. "One day,

my picture will be here too," she thought. "It's not difficult to become a singer. I know how to sing. I'm not bad-looking. Why shouldn't I be a famous singer?"

34

At the bus stop, Chunyu Bai felt hungry.

35

Ah Xing entered her building; Ah Cai, the shop assistant from the grocery, basket in hand, caught up with her. In the basket were two or three dozen bottles of milk. Ah Cai always delivered milk at this time of day.

While they were waiting for the lift, Ah Cai smiled obsequiously at Ah Xing. When he smiled, he looked even uglier.

Ah Xing didn't smile.

Ah Xing loathed Ah Cai.

Ah Cai was very ugly—a brandy nose, a face pitted like a gourd, and a scar on his temple.

Every time she saw Ah Cai, Ah Xing pulled a long face and turned her eyes away.

The lift door opened.

Ah Xing entered the lift; so did Ah Cai.

Only the two of them were in the lift. Ah Cai gazed lewdly at Ah Xing.

As if he were a philatelist examining a rare stamp! Ah Xing held her head high and stared at the ventilation fan in the ceiling. She looked very arrogant this way, but in fact, Ah Xing was definitely not an arrogant girl.

The fan was covered with a wire screen. A thick layer of dust had gathered on the screen and hung there like black cotton floss.

"Strange," she thought, "there shouldn't be so much dust on the fan. When the fan is on, it creates wind. How can so much dust accumulate?"

"What are you looking at?" Ah Cai tried to strike up a conversation. Ah Xing continued to look at the fan, ignoring him. Ah Cai wouldn't easily let go of this chance; he added, "What's there to look at in a fan? You . . ."

The lift door opened before Ah Cai could finish

his sentence. Ah Xing strode out of the lift without a glance at him.

36

Chunyu Bai stood at the bus stop, waiting for a tunnel bus.

"The Cross Harbour Tunnel is a wonderful piece of engineering linking Kowloon and Hong Kong island. In the past, if you wanted to go to the Hong Kong side from Kowloon or vice versa, you had to waste a lot of time, first on the bus and then the ferry. But now, a tunnel bus from Mongkok to Causeway Bay takes less than fifteen minutes," he thought.

The bus arrived.

He got on.

He dropped a coin into the fare box, climbed to the upper deck, and chose a window seat.

When the bus started to move, the street scene moved before his eyes like a revolving stage in a theatre.

More than twenty years ago, when he first arrived in Hong Kong from the north, the buildings in this district were all old; now they were all skyscrapers.

"That's Hong Kong, a small place with a large population. The only direction to build is up," he thought.

The bus continued along Nathan Road.

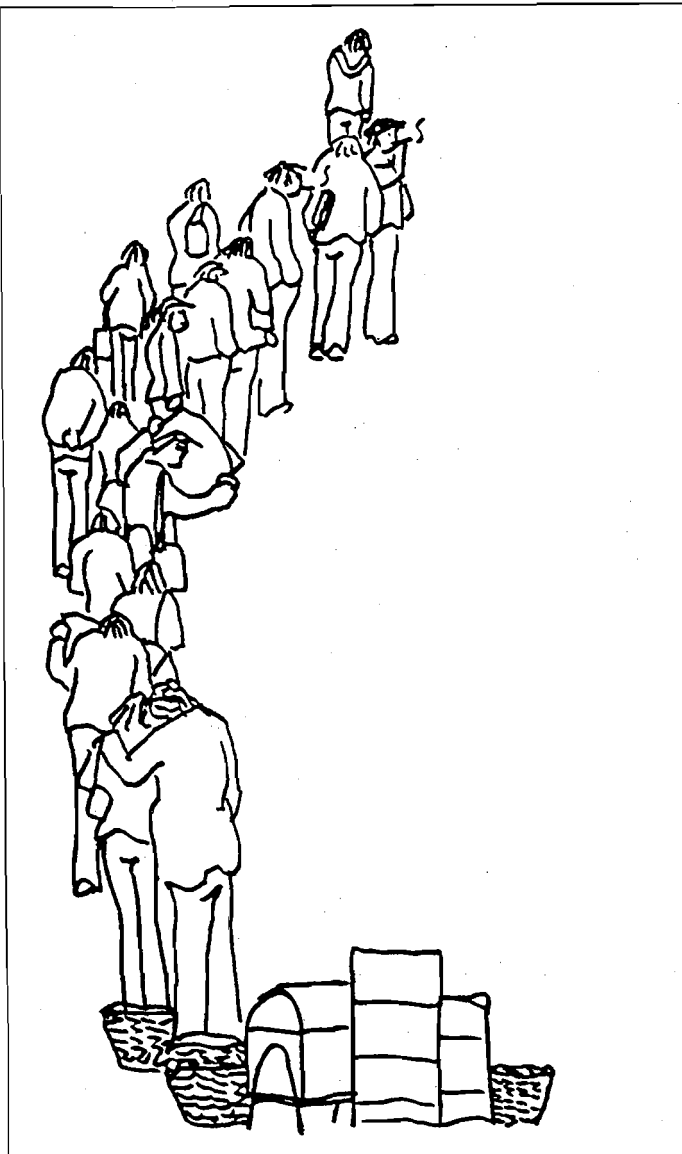
"Just building upwards won't solve the housing shortage. The government has to develop the rural areas and build more satellite towns. More people will certainly move to satellite towns in the near future," he thought.

The bus made a turn.

"Satellite towns will certainly develop quickly and that means the construction of an underground railway will become an urgent task. Without an underground, people who live in satellite towns can only take private cars, taxis, buses or mini-buses if they work in the urban areas and this in turn will generate another problem—traffic congestion," he thought.

The bus was heading towards Hung Hom.

"Over twenty years ago, the population of Hong Kong was only 800,000; now, it's over four million. Over twenty years ago, most of the new



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buildings in Hung Hom were four storeys high; now these have been pulled down and tower blocks put up. But still, this won't relieve the serious housing shortage," he thought.

The bus had reached Hung Hom and was moving towards the Cross Harbour Tunnel entrance.

"Over twenty years ago, most of the people who swarmed into Hong Kong from the north brought some money with them. At first, everyone

had high hopes; they thought they could achieve great things in this place where East meets West. But after a few years, they found themselves living in smaller flats and riding in bigger vehicles; the situation had deteriorated a lot," he thought.

The bus stopped at the tunnel entrance.

"Over twenty years ago, who could have predicted that buses, lorries, taxis, mini-buses and private cars would all race along beneath Victoria Harbour?" he thought.

The bus drove into the tunnel.

"Over twenty years ago, who could have predicted that it would only take three minutes to travel from Kowloon to Hong Kong and vice versa?" he thought.

Ten minutes later, he was having dinner at a restaurant in North Point.

37

After dinner, Ah Xing turned on the television. The picture that came up on the screen was a Mandarin movie.

Having missed the first part of the movie, one would of course have little interest in it. But Ah Xing just sat there dumbly.

The hero was very handsome; Ah Xing was happy whenever she saw handsome men.

38

After dinner, Chunyu Bai went home. He fell asleep watching a Mandarin movie on television. He dreamt that he was sitting in a beautiful wooded spot. There were flowers blooming on the trees, fragrant flowers. The fragrance added a sense of mystery to the beauty of the environment. Chunyu Bai didn't know what kind of a place it was; he only knew it was something like a park. He was sitting on a bench. Ah Xing was sitting on the same bench. They were sitting side by side, as they had sat watching the movie in the cinema.

39

When the Mandarin movie was over, Ah Xing went to bed. She had a dream; she dreamt that she was in a bedroom with no walls. The bedroom had very modern furniture; besides a dressing table, a wardrobe and an easy chair, there was also a large bed. All the furniture was pink. She was lying in bed with a very handsome young man. She had no clothes on, neither did he. The situation was very similar to that of the man and the woman in

the photograph that she had picked up in the street. That photograph had impressed her very deeply.

40

In his beautiful dream, the bench on which Chunyu Bai and Ah Xing were sitting suddenly turned into a bed, but the trees were still there. There were flowers on the trees and the flowers were very fragrant. The fragrance that Chunyu Bai smelt could possibly have come from Ah Xing's body. A moment ago, Ah Xing had her clothes on; but now she was naked. Nothing was more seductive than a young girl's breasts. Chunyu Bai became very young; his thoughts, his feelings and his energy were those of a young man of twenty. When he was twenty years old, Chunyu Bai often did this kind of thing. Now, in his dream, he was young again.

41

It was a new thrill; even in her dream she could sense this new thrill clearly. She could even feel the faint warmth of the other person's body. For Ah Xing, this feeling was brand new. She accepted this brand new thrill with enthusiasm. When the man put his tongue into her mouth, she felt a ball of fire burning in her heart.

42

When Chunyu Bai returned to reality from his dream world, morning had broken. He blinked, got up, and walked to the window for a breath of fresh air; the morning sun had driven the darkness away. There was a drying rack outside the window; a sparrow flew from afar and perched on the rack. After a short while, another sparrow flew from afar and perched on the rack. One bird looked at the other and vice versa. Then both birds took off, one towards the east, the other towards the west.